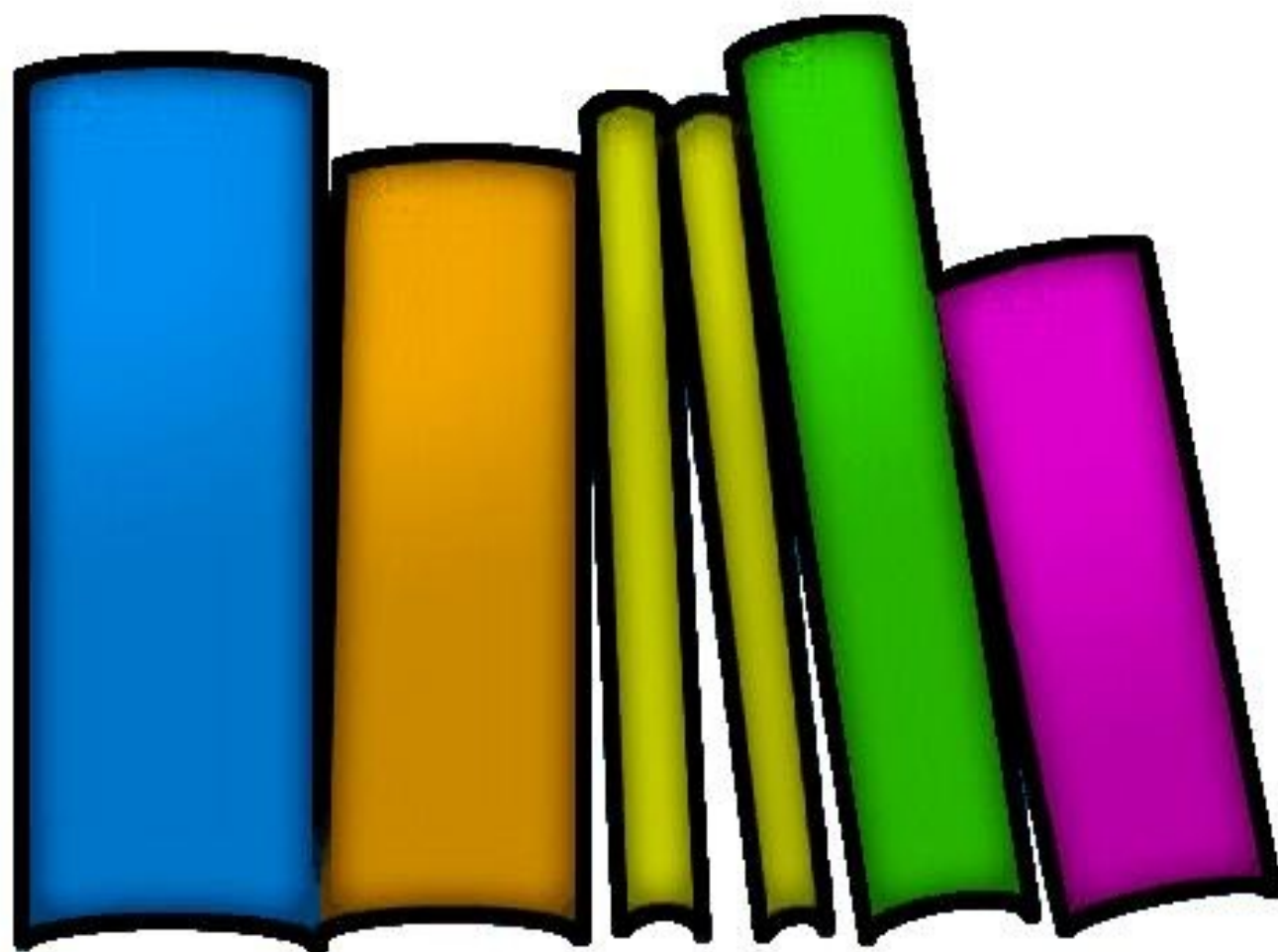


J

Ed McBain



[calibre 0.6.54]

“J”

* * * *

1

It was the first of April, the day for fools.

It was also Saturday, and the day before Easter.

Death should not have come at all, but it had. And, having come, perhaps it was justified in its confusion. Today was the fool's day, the day for practical jokes. Tomorrow was Easter, the day of the bonnet and egg, the day for the spring march of finery and frills. Oh, yes, it was rumored in some quarters of the city that Easter Sunday had something to do with a different sort of march at a place called Calvary, but it had been a long long time since death was vetoed and rendered null and void, and people have short memories, especially where holidays are concerned.

Today, Death was very much in evidence, and plainly confused. Striving as it was to reconcile the trappings of two holidays — or perhaps three — it succeeded in producing only a blended distortion.

The young man who lay on his back in the alley was wearing black, as if in mourning. But over the black, in contradiction, was a fine silken shawl, fringed at both ends. He seemed dressed for spring, but this was the fool's day, and Death could not resist the temptation.

The black was punctuated with red and blue and white. The cobbled floor of the alley followed the same decorative scheme, red and blue and white, splashed about in gay spring abandon. Two overturned buckets of paint, one white, one blue, seemed to have ricocheted off the wall of the building and come to

disorderly rest on the alley floor. The man's shoes were spattered with paint. His black garment was covered with paint. His hands were drenched in paint. Blue and white, white and blue, his black garment, his silken shawl, the floor of the alley, the brick wall of the building before which he lay — all were splashed with blue and white.

The third color did not mix well with the others.

The third color was red, a little too primary, a little too bright.

The third color had not come from a paint can. The third color still spilled freely from two dozen open wounds on the man's chest and stomach and neck and face and hands, staining the black, staining the silken shawl, spreading in a bright red pool on the alley floor, suffusing the paint with sunset, mingling with the paint but not mixing well, spreading until it touched the foot of the ladder lying crookedly along the wall, encircling the paintbrush lying at the wall's base. The bristles of the brush were still wet with white paint. The man's blood touched the bristles, and then trickled to the cement line where brick wall touched cobbled alley, flowed in an inching stream downward toward the street.

Someone had signed the wall.

On the wall, someone had painted, in bright, white paint, the single letter. J. Nothing more — only **J**.

The blood trickled down the alley to the city street.

Night was coming.

* * * *

Detective Cotton Hawes was a tea drinker. He had picked up the

habit from his minister father, the man who'd named him after Cotton Mather, the last of the red-hot Puritans. In the afternoons, the good Reverend Jeremiah Hawes had entertained members of his congregation, serving tea and cakes which his wife Matilda baked in the old, iron, kitchen oven. The boy, Cotton Hawes, had been allowed to join the tea-drinking congregation, thus developing a habit which had continued to this day.

At eight o'clock on the night of April first, while a young man lay in an alleyway with two dozen bleeding wounds shrieking in silence to the passersby on the street below, Hawes sat drinking tea. As a boy, he had downed the hot beverage in the book-lined study at the rear of the parish house, a mixture of Oolong and Pekoe which his mother brewed in the kitchen and served in English bone-china cups she had inherited from her grandmother. Tonight, he sat in the grubby, shopworn comfort of the 87th Precinct squadroom and drank, from a cardboard container, the tea Alf Miscolo has prepared in the clerical office. It was hot tea. That was about the most he could say for it.

The open, mesh-covered windows of the squadroom admitted a mild spring breeze from Grover Park across the way, a warm seductive breeze which made him wish he were outside on the street. It was criminal to be catching on a night like this. It was also boring. Aside from one wife-beating squeal, which Steve Carella was out checking this very minute, the telephone had been ominously quiet. In the silence of the squadroom, Hawes had managed to type up three overdue D.D. reports, two chits for gasoline and a bulletin-board notice to the men of the squad reminding them that this was the first of the month and time for them to cough up fifty cents each for the maintenance of Alf Miscolo's improvised kitchen. He had also read a half-dozen FBI flyers, and listed in his little black memo book the license-plate numbers of two more stolen vehicles.

Now he sat drinking insipid tea and wondering why it was so quiet. He supposed the lull had something to do with Easter. Maybe there was going to be an egg-rolling ceremony down South Twelfth Street tomorrow. Maybe all the criminals and potential criminals in the 87th were home dyeing. Eggs, that is. He smiled and took another sip of the tea. From the clerical office beyond the slattered rail divider which separated the squadroom from the corridor, he could hear the rattling of Miscolo's typewriter. Above that, and beyond it, coming from the iron-runged steps which led upstairs, he could hear the ring of footsteps. He turned toward the corridor just as Steve Carella entered it from the opposite end.

Carella walked easily and nonchalantly toward the railing, a big man who moved with fine-honed athletic precision. He shoved open the gate in the railing, walked to his desk, took off his jacket, pulled down his tie and unbuttoned the top button of his shirt.

"What happened?" Hawes asked.

"The same thing that always happens," Carella said. He sighed heavily and rubbed his hand over his face. "Is there any more coffee?" he asked.

"I'm drinking tea."

"Hey, Miscolo!" Carella yelled. "Any coffee in there?"

"I'll put on some more water!" Miscolo yelled back.

"So what happened?" Hawes asked.

"Oh, the same old jazz," Carella said. "It's a waste of time to even go out on these wife-beating squeals. I've never answered one yet that netted anything."

“She wouldn’t press charges,” Hawes said knowingly.

“Charges, hell. There wasn’t even any beating, according to her. She’s got blood running out of her nose, and a shiner the size of a half-dollar, and she’s the one who screamed for the patrolman — but the minute I get there, everything’s calm and peaceful.” Carella shook his head. “‘A beating, officer?’” he mimicked in a high, shrill voice. “‘You must be mistaken, officer. Why, my husband is a good, kind, sweet man. We’ve been married for twenty years, and he never lifted a finger to me. You must be mistaken, sir.’”

“Then who yelled for the cop?” Hawes asked.

“That’s just what I said to her.”

“What’d she answer?”

“She said, ‘Oh, we were just having a friendly little family argument.’ The guy almost knocked three teeth out of her mouth, but that’s just a friendly little family argument. So I asked her how she happened to have a bloody nose and a mouse under her eye and — catch this, Cotton — she said she got them ironing.”

“What?”

“Ironing.”

“She said the ironing board collapsed and the iron jumped up and hit her in the eye, and one of the ironing board legs clipped her in the nose. By the time I left, she and her husband were ready to go on a second honeymoon. She was hugging him all over the place, and he was sneaking his hand under her dress, so I figured I’d come back here where it isn’t so sexy.”

“Good idea,” Hawes said.

“Hey, Miscolo!” Carella shouted. “Where’s that coffee?”

“A watched pot never boils!” Miscolo shouted back cleverly.

“We’ve got George Bernard Shaw in the clerical office,” Carella said. “Anything happen since I left?”

“Nothing. Not a peep.”

“The streets are quiet, too,” Carella said, suddenly thoughtful.

“Before the storm,” Hawes said.

“Mmmm.”

The squadroom was silent again. Beyond the meshed window, they could hear the myriad sounds of the city, the auto horns, the muffled cries, the belching of buses, a little girl singing as she walked past the station house.

“Well, I suppose I ought to type up some overdue reports,” Carella said.

He wheeled over a typing cart, took three Detective Division reports from his desk, inserted carbon between two of the sheets and began typing.

Hawes stared at the distant lights of Isola’s buildings and sucked in a draught of mesh-filtered spring air.

He wondered why it was so quiet.

He wondered just exactly what all those people were doing out there.

Some of those people were playing April Fool's Day pranks. Some of them were getting ready for tomorrow, which was Easter Sunday. And some of them were celebrating a third and ancient holiday known as Passover. Now that's a coincidence which could cause one to speculate upon the similarity of dissimilar religions and the existence of a single, all-powerful God, and all that sort of mystic stuff, if one were inclined toward speculation. Speculator or not, it doesn't take a big detective to check a calendar, and the coincidence was there, take it or leave it. Buddhist, atheist, or Seventh Day Adventist, you had to admit there was something very democratic and wholesome about Easter and Passover coinciding the way they did, something which gave a festive air to the entire city. Jews and Gentiles alike, because of a chance mating of the Christian and the Hebrew calendars, were celebrating important holidays at almost the same time. Passover had officially begun at sunset on Friday, March thirty-first, another coincidence, since Passover did not always fall on the Jewish Sabbath; but this year, it did. And tonight was April first, and the traditional second *seder* service, the annual re-enactment of the Jews' liberation from Egyptian bondage, was being observed in Jewish homes throughout the city.

Detective Meyer Meyer was a Jew.

Or at least, he thought he was a Jew. Sometimes he wasn't quite certain. Because if he was a Jew, he sometimes asked himself, how come he hadn't seen the inside of a synagogue in twenty years? And if he was a Jew, how come two of his favorite dishes were roast pork and broiled lobster, both of which were forbidden by the dietary laws of the religion? And if he was such a Jew, how come he allowed his son Alan — who was thirteen and who had been *barmitzvah*ed only last month — to play Post Office with Alice McCarthy, who was as Irish as a four-leaf clover?

Sometimes, Meyer got confused.

Sitting at the head of the traditional table on this night of the second *seder*, he didn't know quite how he felt. He looked at his family, Sarah and the three children, and then he looked at the *seder* table, festively set with a floral centerpiece and lighted candles and the large platter upon which were placed the traditional objects — three matzos, a roasted shankbone, a roasted egg, bitter herbs, charoses, watercress — and he still didn't know exactly how he felt. He took a deep breath and began the prayer.

"And it was evening," Meyer said, "and it was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day, God had finished his work which He had made: and He rested on the seventh day from his work which he had done. And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it, because that in it He rested from all his work, which God had created in order to make it."

There was a certain beauty to the words, and they lingered in his mind as he went through the ceremony, describing the various objects on the table and their symbolic meaning. When he elevated the dish containing the bone and the egg, everyone sitting around the table took hold of the dish, and Meyer said, "This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt; let all those who are hungry, enter and eat thereof, and all who are in distress, come and celebrate the Passover."

He spoke of his ancestors, but he wondered who he — their descendant — was.

"Wherefore is this night distinguished from all other nights?" he asked. "Any other night, we may eat either leavened or unleavened bread, but on this night only unleavened bread; all other nights, we may eat any species of herbs, but on this night only bitter herbs . . ."

The telephone rang. Meyer stopped speaking and looked at his wife. For a moment, both seemed reluctant to break the spell of the ceremony. And then Meyer gave a slight, barely discernible shrug. Perhaps, as he went to the telephone, he was recalling that he was a cop first, and a Jew only second.

“Hello?” he said.

“Meyer, this is Cotton Hawes.”

“What is it, Cotton?”

“Look, I know this is your holiday —”

“What’s the trouble?”

“We’ve got a killing,” Hawes said.

Patiently, Meyer said, “We’ve always got a killing.”

“This is different. A patrolman called in about five minutes ago. The guy was stabbed in the alley behind —”

“Cotton, I don’t understand,” Meyer said. “I switched the duty with Steve. Didn’t he show up?”

“What is it, Meyer?” Sarah called from the dining room.

“It’s all right, it’s all right,” Meyer answered. “Isn’t Steve there?” he asked Hawes, annoyance in his voice.

“Sure, he’s out on the squeal, but that’s not the point.”

“What *is* the point?” Meyer asked. “I was right in the middle of —”

“We need you on this one,” Hawes said. “Look, I’m sorry as hell. But there are aspects to — Meyer, this guy they found in the alley —”

“Well, what about him?” Meyer asked.

“We think he’s a rabbi,” Hawes said.

* * * *

2

The sexton of the Isola Jewish Center was named Yirmiyahu Cohen, and when he introduced himself, he used the Jewish word for sexton, *shamash*. He was a tall, thin man in his late fifties, wearing a somber black suit and donning a skullcap the moment he, Carella and Meyer re-entered the synagogue.

The three had stood in the alley behind the synagogue not a moment before, staring down at the body of the dead rabbi and the trail of mayhem surrounding him. Yirmiyahu had wept openly, his eyes closed, unable to look at the dead man who had been the Jewish community's spiritual leader. Carella and Meyer, who had both been cops for a good long time, did not weep.

There is plenty to weep at if you happen to be looking down at the victim of a homicidal stabbing. The rabbi's black robe and fringed prayer shawl were drenched with blood, but happily, they hid from view the multiple stab wounds in his chest and abdomen, wounds which would later be examined at the morgue for external description, number, location, dimension, form of perforation and direction and depth of penetration. Since twenty-five per cent of all fatal stab wounds are cases of cardiac penetration, and since there was a wild array of slashes and a sodden mass of coagulating blood near or around the rabbi's heart, the two detectives automatically assumed that a cardiac stab wound had been the cause of death, and were grateful for the fact that the rabbi was fully clothed. They had both visited the mortuary and seen naked bodies on naked slabs, no longer bleeding, all blood and all life drained away, but skin torn like the flimsiest cheesecloth, the soft interior of the body deprived of its protective flesh, turned

outward, exposed, the ripe wounds gaping and open, had stared at evisceration and wanted to vomit.

The rabbi now owned flesh, too, and at least a part of it had been exposed to his attacker's fury. Looking down at the dead man, neither Carella nor Meyer wanted to weep, but their eyes tightened a little and their throats went peculiarly dry because death by stabbing is a damn frightening thing. Whoever had handled the knife had done so in apparent frenzy. The only exposed areas of the rabbi's body were his hands, his neck, and his face — and these, more than the apparently fatal, hidden incisions beneath the black robe and the prayer shawl, shrieked bloody murder to the night. The rabbi's throat showed two superficial cuts which almost resembled suicidal hesitation cuts. A deeper horizontal slash at the front of his neck had exposed the trachea, carotids and jugular vein, but these did not appear to be severed — at least, not to the layman eyes of Carella and Meyer. There were cuts around the rabbi's eyes and a cut across the bridge of his nose.

But the wounds which caused both Carella and Meyer to turn away from the body were the slashes on the insides of the rabbi's hands. These, they knew, were the defense cuts. These spoke louder than all the others, for they immediately reconstructed the image of a weaponless man struggling to protect himself against the swinging blade of an assassin, raising his hands in hopeless defense, the fingers cut and hanging, the palms slashed to ribbons. At the end of the alley, the patrolman who'd first arrived on the scene was identifying the body to the medical examiner as the one he'd found. Another patrolman was pushing curious bystanders behind the police barricade he'd set up. The laboratory boys and photographers had already begun their work.

Carella and Meyer were happy to be inside the synagogue again.

* * * *

The room was silent and empty, a house of worship without any worshipers at the moment. They sat on folding chairs in the large, empty room. The eternal light burned over the ark in which the Torah, the five books of Moses, was kept. Forward of the ark, one on each side of it, were the lighted candelabra, the *menorah*, found by tradition in every Jewish house of worship.

Detective Steve Carella began the litany of another tradition. He took out his notebook, poised his pencil over a clean page, turned to Yirmiyahu, and began asking questions in a pattern that had become classic through repeated use.

“What was the rabbi’s name?” he asked.

Yirmiyahu blew his nose and said, “Solomon. Rabbi Solomon.”

“First name?”

“Yaakov.”

“That’s Jacob,” Meyer said. “Jacob Solomon.”

Carella nodded and wrote the name into his book.

“Are you Jewish?” Yirmiyahu asked Meyer.

Meyer paused for an instant, and then said, “Yes.”

“Was he married or single?” Carella asked.

“Married,” Yirmiyahu said.

“Do you know his wife’s name?”

"I'm not sure. I think it's Havah."

"That's Eve," Meyer translated.

"And would you know where the rabbi lived?"

"Yes. The house on the corner."

"What's the address?"

"I don't know. It's the house with the yellow shutters."

"How do you happen to be here right now, Mr. Cohen?" Carella asked. "Did someone call to inform you of the rabbi's death?"

"No. No, I often come past the synagogue. To check the light, you see."

"What light is that, sir?" Carella asked.

"The eternal light. Over the ark. It's supposed to burn at all times. Many synagogues have a small electric bulb in the lamp. We're one of the few synagogues in the city who still use oil in it. And, as *shamash*, I felt it was my duty to make certain the light —"

"Is this an Orthodox congregation?" Meyer asked.

"No. It's Conservative," Yirmiyahu said.

"There are three types of congregation now," Meyer explained to Carella. "Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. It gets a little complicated."

"Yes," Yirmiyahu said emphatically.

"So you were coming to the synagogue to check on the lamp," Carella said. "Is that right?"

"That's correct."

"And what happened?"

"I saw a police car at the side of the synagogue. So I walked over and asked what the trouble was. And they told me."

"I see. When was the last time you saw the rabbi alive, Mr. Cohen?"

"At evening services."

"Services start at sundown, Steve. The Jewish day —"

"Yes, I know," Carella said. "What time did services end, Mr. Cohen?"

"At about seven-thirty."

"And the rabbi was here? Is that right?"

"Well, he stepped outside when services were over."

"And you stayed inside. Was there any special reason?"

"Yes. I was collecting the prayer shawls and the *yarmelkas*, and I was putting —"

"*Yarmelkas* are skullcaps," Meyer said. "Those little black —"

"Yes, I know," Carella said. "Go ahead, Mr. Cohen."

"I was putting the *rimonim* back onto the handles of the

scroll.”

“Putting the what, sir?” Carella asked.

“Listen to the big Talmudic scholar,” Meyer said, grinning. “Doesn’t even know what *rimonim* are. They’re these decorative silver covers, Steve, shaped like pomegranates. Symbolizing fruitfulness, I guess.”

Carella returned the grin. “Thank you,” he said.

“A man has been killed,” Yirmiyahu said softly.

The detectives were silent for a moment. The banter between them had been of the faintest sort, mild in comparison to some of the grisly humor that homicide detectives passed back and forth over a dead body. Carella and Meyer were accustomed to working together in an easy, friendly manner, and they were accustomed to dealing with the facts of sudden death, but they realized at once that they had offended the dead rabbi’s sexton.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Cohen,” Carella said. “We meant no offense, you understand.”

The old man nodded stoically, a man who had inherited a legacy of years and years of persecution, a man who automatically concluded that all Gentiles looked upon a Jew’s life as a cheap commodity. There was unutterable sadness on his long, thin face, as if he alone were bearing the oppressive weight of the centuries on his narrow shoulders.

The synagogue seemed suddenly smaller. Looking at the old man’s face and the sadness there, Meyer wanted to touch it gently and say, “It’s all tight, *tsadik*, it’s all right,” the Hebrew word leaping into his mind — *tsadik*, a man possessed of saintly virtues, a person of noble character and simple living.

The silence persisted. Yirmiyahu Cohen began weeping again, and the detectives sat in embarrassment on the folding chairs and waited.

At last Carella said, "Were you still here when the rabbi came inside again?"

"I left while he was gone," Yirmiyahu said. "I wanted to return home. This is the *Pesach*, the Passover. My family was waiting for me to conduct the *seder*."

"I see." Carella paused. He glanced at Meyer.

"Did you hear any noise in the alley, Mr. Cohen?" Meyer asked. "When the rabbi was out there?"

"Nothing."

Meyer sighed and took a package of cigarettes from his jacket pocket. He was about to light one when Yirmiyahu said, "Didn't you say you were Jewish?"

"Huh?" Meyer said. He struck the match.

"You are going to *smoke* on the second day of *Pesach*?" Yirmiyahu asked.

"Oh. Oh, well . . ." The cigarette felt suddenly large in Meyer's hand, the fingers clumsy. He shook out the match. "You — uh — you have any other questions, Steve?" he asked.

"No," Carella said.

"Then I guess you can go, Mr. Cohen," Meyer said. "Thank you very much."

"Shalom," Yirmiyahu said, and shuffled dejectedly out of the room.

"You're not supposed to smoke, you see," Meyer explained to Carella, "on the first two days of Passover, and the last two, a good Jew doesn't smoke, or ride, or work, or handle money or —"

"I thought this was a Conservative synagogue," Carella said. "That sounds like Orthodox practice to me."

"Well, he's an old man," Meyer said. "I guess the customs die hard."

"The way the rabbi did," Carella said grimly.

* * * *

3

They stood outside in the alley where chalk marks outlined the position of the dead body. The rabbi had been carted away, but his blood still stained the cobblestones, and the rampant paint had been carefully sidestepped by the laboratory boys searching for footprints and fingerprints, searching for anything which would provide a lead to the killer.

"J," the wall read.

"You know, Steve, I feel funny on this case," Meyer told Carella.

"I do, too."

Meyer raised his eyebrows, somewhat surprised. "How come?"

"I don't know. I guess because he was a man of God." Carella shrugged. "There's something unworldly and naive and — pure, I guess — about rabbis and priests and ministers and I guess I feel they shouldn't be touched by all the dirty things in life." He paused. "Somebody's got to stay untouched, Meyer."

"Maybe so," Meyer paused. "I feel funny because I'm a Jew, Steve." His voice was very soft. He seemed to be confessing something he would not have admitted to another living soul.

"I can understand that," Carella said gently.

"Are you policemen?"

The voice startled them. It came suddenly from the other end of the alley, and they both whirled instantly to face it.

Instinctively, Meyer's hand reached for the service revolver holstered in his right rear pocket.

"Are you policemen?" the voice asked again. It was a woman's voice, thick with a Yiddish accent. The street lamp was behind the owner of the voice. Meyer and Carella saw only a frail figure clothed in black, pale white hands clutched to the breast of the black coat, pinpoints of light burning where the woman's eyes should have been.

"We're policemen," Meyer answered. His hand hovered near the butt of his pistol. Beside him, he could feel Carella tensed for a draw.

"I know who killed the *rov*? the woman said.

"What?" Carella asked.

"She says she knows who killed the rabbi," Meyer whispered in soft astonishment.

His hand dropped to his side. They began walking toward the street end of the alley. The woman stood there motionless, the light behind her, her face in shadow, the pale hands still,, her eyes burning.

"Who killed him?" Carella said.

"I know the *rotsayach*" the woman answered. "I know the murderer."

"Who?" Carella said again.

"Him!" the woman shouted, and she pointed to the painted

white J on the synagogue wall. “The *sonei Yisroel!* Him!”

“The anti-Semite,” Meyer translated. “She says the anti-Semite did it.”

They had come abreast of the woman now. The three stood at the end of the alley with the street lamp casting long shadows on the cobbles. They could see her face. Black hair and brown eyes, the classic Jewish face of a woman in her fifties, the beauty stained by age and something else, a fine-drawn tension hidden in her eyes and on her mouth.

“What anti-Semite?” Carella asked. He realized he was whispering. There was something about the woman’s face and the blackness of her coat and the paleness of her hands which made whispering a necessity.

“On the next block,” she said. Her voice was a voice of judgment and doom. “The one they call Finch.”

“You saw him kill the rabbi?” Carella asked. “You saw him do it?”

“No.” She paused. “But I know in my heart that he’s the one . . .”

“What’s your name, ma’am?” Meyer asked.

“Hannah Kaufman,” she said. “I know it was him. He said he would do it, and now he has started.”

“He said he would do what?” Meyer asked the old woman patiently.

“He said he would kill all the Jews.”

“You heard him say this?”

"Everyone has heard him."

"His name is Finch?" Meyer asked her. "You're sure?"

"Finch," the woman said. "On the next block. Over the candy store."

"What do you think?" he asked Carella.

Carella nodded. "Let's try him."

* * * *

4

If America is a melting pot, the 87th Precinct is a crucible. Start at the River Harb, the northernmost boundary of the precinct territory, and the first thing you hit is exclusive Smoke Rise, where the walled-in residents sit in white-Protestant respectability in houses set a hundred feet back from private roads, admiring the greatest view the city has to offer. Come out of Smoke Rise and hit fancy Silvermine Road where the aristocracy of apartment buildings have begun to submit to the assault of time and the encroachment of the surrounding slums. Forty-thousand-dollar-a-year executives still live in these apartment buildings, but people write on the walls here, too: limericks, prurient slogans, which industrious doormen try valiantly to erase.

There is nothing so eternal as Anglo-Saxon etched in graphite.

Silvermine Park is south of the Road, and no one ventures there at night. During the day, the park is thronged with governesses idly chatting about the last time they saw Sweden, gently rocking shellacked blue baby buggies. But after sunset, not even lovers will enter the park. The Stem, further south, explodes the moment the sun leaves the sky. Gaudy and incandescent, it mixes Chinese restaurants with Jewish delicatessens, pizza joints with Greek cabarets offering belly dancers. Threadbare as a beggar's sleeve, Ainsley Avenue crosses the center of the precinct, trying to maintain a dignity long gone, crowding the sidewalks with austere but dirty apartment buildings, furnished rooms, garages and a sprinkling of sawdust saloons. Culver Avenue turns completely Irish with the speed of a leprechaun. The faces, the bars, even the

buildings seem displaced, seem to have been stolen and transported from the center of Dublin; but no lace curtains hang in the windows. Poverty turns a naked face to the streets here, setting the pattern for the rest of the precinct territory. Poverty rakes the backs of the Culver Avenue Irish, claws its way onto the white and tan and brown and black faces of the Puerto Ricans lining Mason Avenue, flops onto the beds of the whores of *La Via de Putas*, and then pushes its way into the real crucible, the city side streets where different minority groups live cheek by jowl, as close as lovers, hating each other. It is here that Puerto Rican and Jew, Italian and Negro, Irishman and Cuban are forced by dire economic need to live in a ghetto which, by its very composition, loses definition and becomes a meaningless tangle of unrelated bloodlines.

Rabbi Solomon's synagogue was on the same street as a Catholic church. A Baptist store-front mission was on the avenue leading to the next block. The candy store over which the man named Finch lived was owned by a Puerto Rican whose son had been a cop — a man named Hernandez.

Carella and Meyer paused in the lobby of the building and studied the name plates in the mailboxes. There were eight boxes in the row. Two had name plates. Three had broken locks. The man named Finch lived in apartment thirty-three on the third floor.

The lock on the vestibule door was broken. From behind the stairwell, where the garbage cans were stacked before being put out for collection in the morning, the stink of that evening's dinner remains assailed the nostrils and left the detectives mute until they had gained the first-floor landing.

On the way up to the third floor, Carella said, "This seems too easy, Meyer. It's over before it begins."

On the third-floor landing, both men drew their service

revolvers. They found apartment thirty-three and bracketed the door.

“Mr. Finch?” Meyer called.

“Who is it?” a voice answered.

“Police. Open up.”

The apartment and the hallway went still.

“Finch?” Meyer said.

There was no answer. Carella backed off against the opposite wall. Meyer nodded. Bracing himself against the wall, Carella raised his right foot, the leg bent at the knee, then released it like a triggered spring. The flat of his sole collided with the door just below the lock. The door burst inward, and Meyer followed it into the apartment, his gun in his fist.

Finch was a man in his late twenties, with a square crewcut head and bright green eyes. He was closing the closet door as Meyer burst into the room. He was wearing only trousers and an undershirt, his feet bare. He needed a shave, and the bristles on his chin and face emphasized a white scar that ran from just under his right cheek to the curve of his jaw. He turned from the closet with the air of a man who has satisfactorily completed a mysterious mission.

“Hold it right there,’ Meyer said.

There’s a joke they tell about an old woman on a train who repeatedly asks the man sitting beside her if he’s Jewish. The man, trying to read his newspaper, keeps answering, “No, I’m not Jewish.” The old lady keeps pestering him, tugging at his sleeve, asking the same question over and over again. Finally the man puts down his newspaper and says, “All right, all right,

damn it! I'm Jewish."

And the old lady smiles at him sweetly and says, "You know something? You don't look it."

The joke, of course, relies on a prejudice which assumes that you can tell a man's religion by looking at his face. There was nothing about Meyer Meyer's looks or speech which would indicate that he was Jewish. His face was round and cleanshaven, he was thirty-seven years old and completely bald, and he possessed the bluest eyes this side of Denmark. He was almost six feet tall and perhaps a trifle overweight, and the only conversation he'd had with Finch were the few words he'd spoken through the closed door, and the four words he'd spoken since he entered the apartment, all of which were delivered in big-city English without any noticeable trace of accent.

But when Meyer Meyer said, "Hold it right there," a smile came onto Finch's face, and he answered, "I wasn't going anyplace, Jewboy."

Well, maybe the sight of the rabbi lying in his own blood had been too much for Meyer. Maybe the words "*sonei Yisroel*" had recalled the days of his childhood when, one of the few Orthodox Jews in a Gentile neighborhood, and bearing the double-barreled name his father had foisted upon him, he was forced to defend himself against every hoodlum who crossed his path, invariably against overwhelming odds. He was normally a very patient man. He had borne his father's practical joke with amazing good will, even though he sometimes grinned mirthlessly through bleeding lips. But tonight, this second night of Passover, after having looked down at the bleeding rabbi, after having heard the tortured sobs of the sexton, after having seen the patiently suffering face of the woman in black, the words hurled at him from the other end of the apartment had a startling effect.

Meyer said nothing. He simply walked to where Finch was standing near the closet, and lifted the .38 high above his head. He flipped the gun up as his arm descended, so that the heavy butt was in striking position as it whipped toward Finch's jaw.

Finch brought up his hands, but not to shield his face in defense. His hands were huge, with big knuckles, the imprimatur of the habitual street fighter. He opened the fingers and caught Meyer's descending arm at the wrist, stopping the gun three inches from his face.

He wasn't dealing with a kid; he was dealing with a cop. He obviously intended to shake that gun out of Meyer's fist and then beat him senseless on the floor of the apartment. But Meyer brought up his right knee and smashed it into Finch's groin, and then, his wrist still pinioned, he bunched his left fist and drove it hard and straight into Finch's gut. That did it. The fingers loosened and Finch backed away a step just as Meyer brought the pistol back across his own body and then unleashed it in a backhand swipe. The butt cracked against Finch's jaw and sent him sprawling against the closet wall.

Miraculously, the jaw did not break. Finch collided with the closet, grabbed the door behind him with both hands opened wide and flat against the wood, and then shook his head. He blinked his eyes and shook his head again. By what seemed to be sheer will power, he managed to stand erect without falling on his face.

Meyer stood watching him, saying nothing, breathing hard. Carella, who had come into the room, stood at the far end, ready to shoot Finch if he so much as raised a pinky.

"Your name Finch?" Meyer asked.

"I don't talk to Jews," Finch answered.

"Then try *me*," Carella said. "What's your name?"

"Go to hell, you and your Jewboy friend both."

Meyer did not raise his voice. He simply took a step closer to Finch, and very softly said, "Mister, in two minutes, you're gonna be a cripple because you resisted arrest."

He didn't have to say anything else, because his eyes told the full story, and Finch was a fast reader.

"Okay," Finch said, nodding. "That's my name."

"What's in the closet, Finch?" Carella asked.

"My clothes."

"Get away from the door."

"What for?"

Neither of the cops answered. Finch studied them for ten seconds, and quickly moved away from the door. Meyer opened it. The closet was stacked high with piles of tied and bundled pamphlets. The cord on one bundle was untied, the pamphlets spilling onto the closet floor. Apparently, this bundle was the one Finch had thrown into the closet when he'd heard the knock on the door. Meyer stooped and picked up one of the pamphlets. It was badly and cheaply printed, but the intent was unmistakable. The title of the pamphlet was "The Bloodsucker Jew."

"Where'd you get this?" Meyer asked.

"I belong to a book club," Finch answered.

"There are a few laws against this sort of thing," Carella

said.

“Yeah?” Finch answered. “Name me one.”

“Happy to. Section 1340 of the Penal Law — libel defined.”

“Maybe you ought to read Section 1342,” Finch said. “*‘The publication is justified when the matter charged as libelous is true, and was published with good motives and for justifiable ends.’*”

“Then let’s try Section 514,” Carella said. “‘A person who denies or aids or incites another to deny any person because of race, creed, color or national origin...’”

“I’m not trying to incite anyone,” Finch said, grinning.

“Nor am I a lawyer,” Carella said. “But we can also try Section 700, which defines discrimination, and Section 1430, which makes it a felony to perform an act of malicious injury to a place of religious worship.”

“Huh?” Finch said.

“Yeah,” Carella answered.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about the little paint job you did on the synagogue wall.”

“What paint job? What synagogue?”

“Where were you at eight o’clock tonight, Finch?”

“Out.”

“Where?”

“I don’t remember.”

“You better *start* remembering.”

“Why? Is there a section of the Penal Law against loss of memory?”

“No,” Carella said. “But there’s one against homicide.”

* * * *

5

The team stood around him in the squadroom.

The team consisted of Detectives Steve Carella., Meyer Meyer, Cotton Hawes., and Bert Kling. Two detectives from Homicide South had put in a brief appearance to legitimize the action, and then went home to sleep, knowing full well that the investigation of a homicide is always left to the precinct discovering the stiff. The team stood around Finch in a loose semicircle. This wasn't a movie sound stage, so there wasn't a bright light shining in Finch's eyes, nor did any of the cops lay a finger on him. These days, there were too many smart-assed lawyers around who were ready and able to leap upon irregular interrogation methods when and if a case finally came to trial. The detectives simply stood around Finch in a loose, relaxed semicircle, and their only weapons were a thorough familiarity with the interrogation process and with each other, and the mathematical superiority of four minds pitted against one.

"What time did you leave the apartment?" Hawes asked.

"Around seven."

"And what time did you return?" Kling asked.

"Nine, nine-thirty. Something like that."

"Where'd you go?" Carella asked.

"I had to see somebody."

"A rabbi?" Meyer asked.

"No."

"Who?"

"I don't want to get anybody in trouble."

"You're in plenty of trouble yourself," Hawes said. "Where'd you go?"

"No place."

"Okay, suit yourself," Carella said. "You've been shooting your mouth off about killing Jews, haven't you?"

"I never said anything like that."

"Where'd you get these pamphlets?"

"I found them."

"You agree with what they say?"

"Yes."

"You know where the synagogue in this neighborhood is?"

"Yes."

"Were you anywhere near it tonight between seven and nine?"

"No."

"Then where were you?"

"No place."

"Anybody see you there?" Kling asked.

"See me where?"

"The no place you went to."

"Nobody saw me."

"You went no place," Hawes said, "and nobody saw you. Is that right?"

"That's right."

"The invisible man," Kling said.

"That's right."

"When you get around to killing all these Jews," Carella said, "how do you plan to do it?"

"I don't plan to kill anybody," he said defensively.

"Who you gonna start with?"

"Nobody."

"Ben-Gurion?"

"Nobody."

"Or maybe you've already started."

"I didn't kill anybody, and I'm not gonna kill anybody. I want to call a lawyer."

"A Jewish lawyer?"

“I wouldn’t have—”

“What wouldn’t you have?”

“Nothing.”

“You like Jews?”

“No.”

“You hate them?”

“No.”

“Then you like them.”

“No, I didn’t say —”

“You either like them or you hate them. Which?”

“That’s none of your goddamn business!”

“But you agree with the crap in those hate pamphlets., don’t you?”

“They’re not hate pamphlets.”

“What do you call them?”

“Expressions of opinion.”

“Whose opinions?”

“*Everybody’s* opinion!”

“Yours included?”

“Yes, mine included!”

“Do you know Rabbi Solomon?”

“No.”

“What do you think of rabbis in general?”

“I never think of rabbis.”

“But you think of Jews a lot, don’t you?”

“There’s no crime about think—”

“If you think of Jews you must think of rabbis. Isn’t that right?”

“Why should I waste my time —”

“The rabbi is the spiritual leader of the Jewish people, isn’t he?”

“I don’t know anything about rabbis.”

“But you must know that.”

“What if I do?”

“Well, if you said you were going to kill the Jews —”

“I never said —”

“— then a good place to start would be with —”

“I never said anything like that!”

“We’ve got a witness who heard you! A good place to start would be with a rabbi, isn’t that so?”

“Go shove your rabbi —”

“Where were you between seven and nine tonight?”

“No place.”

“You were behind that synagogue, weren’t you?”

“No.”

“You were painting a J on the wall, weren’t you?”

“No! No, I wasn’t!”

“You were stabbing a rabbi!”

“You were killing a Jew!”

“I wasn’t any place near that —”

“Book him, Cotton. Suspicion of murder.”

“Suspicion of — I’m telling you I wasn’t—”

“Either shut up or start talking, you bastard,” Carella said. Finch shut up.

* * * *

6

The girl came to see Meyer Meyer on Easter Sunday.

She had reddish-brown hair and brown eyes, and she wore a dress of bright persimmon with a sprig of flowers pinned to the left breast. She stood at the railing and none of the detectives in the squadroom even noticed the flowers; they were too busy speculating on the depth and texture of the girl's rich curves.

The girl didn't say a word. She didn't have to. The effect was almost comic, akin to the cocktail-party scene where the voluptuous blonde takes out a cigarette and four hundred men are stampeded in the rush to light it. The first man to reach the slatted rail divider was Cotton Hawes, since he was single and unattached. The second man was Hal Willis, who was also single and a good red-blooded American boy. Meyer Meyer, an old married poop, contented himself with ogling the girl from behind his desk. The word *shtik* crossed Meyer's mind, but he rapidly pushed the thought aside.

"Can I help you, miss?" Hawes and Willis asked simultaneously.

"I'd like to see Detective Meyer," the girl said.

"Meyer?" Hawes asked, as if his manhood had been maligned.

"Meyer?" Willis repeated.

"Is he the man handling the murder of the rabbi?"

“Well we’re *all* sort of working on it,” Hawes said modestly.

“I’m Artie Finch’s girl friend,” the girl said. “I want to talk to Detective Meyer.”

Meyer rose from his desk with the air of a man who has been singled out from the stag line by the belle of the ball. Using his best radio announcer’s voice, and his best company manners, he said, “Yes, miss, I’m Detective Meyer.”

He held open the gate in the railing, all but executed a bow, and led the girl to his desk. Hawes and Kling watched as the girl sat and crossed her legs. Meyer moved a pad into place with all the aplomb of a General Motors executive.

“I’m sorry, miss,” he said. “What was your name?”

“Eleanor,” she said. “Eleanor Fay.”

“F-A-Y-E?” Meyer asked, writing.

“F-A-Y.”

“And you’re Arthur Finch’s fiancée? Is that right?”

“I’m his girl friend,” Eleanor corrected.

“You’re not engaged?”

“Not officially, no.” She smiled demurely, modestly and sweetly. Across the room, Cotton Hawes rolled his eyes toward the ceiling.

“What did you want to see me about, Miss Fay?” Meyer asked.

"I wanted to see you about Arthur. He's innocent. He didn't kill that man."

"I see. What do you know about it, Miss Fay?"

"Well, I read in the paper that the rabbi was killed sometime between seven-thirty and nine. I think that's right, isn't it?"

"Approximately, yes."

"Well, Arthur couldn't have done it. I know where he was during that time."

"And where was he?" Meyer asked.

He figured he knew just what the girl would say. He had heard the same words from an assortment of molls, mistresses, fiancées, girl friends and just plain acquaintances of men accused of everything from disorderly conduct to first-degree murder.

The girl would protest that Finch was with her during that time. After a bit of tooth-pulling, she would admit that — well — they were alone together. After a little more coaxing, the girl would reluctantly state, the reluctance adding credulity to her story, that — well — they were alone in intimate circumstances together. The alibi having been firmly established, she would then wait patiently for her man's deliverance.

"And where was he?" Meyer asked, and waited patiently.

"From seven to eight," Eleanor said, "he was with a man named Bret Loomis in a restaurant called The Gate, on Culver and South Third."

"What?" Meyer was surprised.

"Yes. From there, Arthur went to see his sister in Riverhead. I can give you the address if you like. He got there at about eight-thirty and stayed a half-hour or so. Then he went straight home."

"What time did he get home?"

"Ten o'clock."

"He told us nine, nine-thirty."

"He was mistaken. I know he got home at ten because he called me the minute he was in the house. It was ten o'clock."

"I see. And he told you he'd just got home?"

"Yes." Eleanor Fay nodded and uncrossed her legs. Willis, at the water cooler, did not miss the sudden revealing glimpse of nylon and thigh.

"Did he also tell you he'd spent all that time with Loomis first and then with his sister?"

"Yes, he did."

"Then why didn't he tell *us*?" Meyer asked.

"I don't know why. Arthur is a person who respects family and friends. I suppose he didn't want to involve them with the police."

"That's very considerate of him," Meyer said drily, "especially since he's being held on suspicion of murder. What's his sister's name?"

"Irene Granavan. Mrs. Carl Granavan."

“And her address?”

“Nineteen-eleven Morris Road. In Riverhead.”

“Know where I can find this Bret Loomis?”

“He lives in a rooming house on Culver Avenue. The address is 3918. It’s near Fourth.”

“You came pretty well prepared, didn’t you, Miss Fay?” Meyer asked.

“If you don’t come prepared,” Eleanor answered, “why come at all?”

* * * *

7

Bret Loomis was thirty-one years old, five feet six inches tall, bearded. When he admitted the detectives to the apartment, he was wearing a bulky black sweater and light-fitting dungarees. Standing next to Cotton Hawes, he looked like a little boy who had tried on a false beard in an attempt to get a laugh out of his father.

“Sorry to bother you, Mr. Loomis,” Meyer said. “We know this is Easter, and —”

“Oh, yeah?” Loomis said. He seemed surprised. “Hey, that’s right, ain’t it? It’s Easter. I’ll be damned. Maybe I oughta go out and buy myself a pot of flowers.”

“You didn’t know it was Easter?” Hawes asked.

“Like, man, who ever reads the newspapers? Gloom, gloom! I’m fed up to here with it. Let’s have a beer, celebrate Easter. Okay?”

“Well, thanks,” Meyer said, “but —”

“Come on, so it ain’t allowed. Who’s gonna know besides you, me and the bedpost? Three beers coming up.”

Meyer looked at Hawes and shrugged. Hawes shrugged back. Together, they watched Loomis as he went to the refrigerator in one corner of the room and took out three bottles of beer.

“Sit down,” he said. “You’ll have to drink from the bottle

because I'm a little short of glasses. Sit down, sit down."

The detectives glanced around the room, puzzled.

"Oh," Loomis said, "you'd better sit on the floor. I'm a little short of chairs."

The three men squatted around a low table which had obviously been made from a tree stump. Loomis put the bottles on the table top, lifted his own bottle, said "Cheers," and took a long drag at it.

"What do you do for a living, Mr. Loomis?" Meyer asked.

"I live," Loomis said.

"What?"

"I *live* for a living. That's what I do."

"I mean, how do you support yourself?"

"I get payment from my ex-wife."

"*You* get payments?" Hawes asked.

"Yeah. She was so delighted to get rid of me that she made a settlement. A hundred bucks a week. That's pretty good, isn't it?"

"That's very good," Meyer said.

"You think so?" Loomis seemed thoughtful. "I think I coulda boosted it to *two* hundred if I held out a little longer. The bitch was running around with another guy, you see, and was all hot to marry him. He's got plenty of loot. I bet I coulda boosted it to two hundred."

“How long do these payments continue?” Hawes asked, fascinated.

“Until I get married again — which I will never ever do as long as I live. Drink your beer. It’s good beer.” He took a drag at his bottle and said, “What’d you want to see me about?”

“Do you know a man named Arthur Finch?”

“Sure. He in trouble?”

“Yes.”

“What’d he do?”

“Well, let’s skip that for the moment, Mr. Loomis,” Hawes said. “We’d like you to tell us —”

“Where’d you get that white streak in your hair?” Loomis asked suddenly.

“Huh?” Hawes touched his left temple unconsciously. “Oh, I got knifed once. It grew back this way.”

“All you need is a blue streak on the other temple. Then you’ll look like the American flag,” Loomis said, and laughed.

“Yeah,” Hawes said. “Mr. Loomis, can you tell us where you were last night between seven and eight o’clock?”

“Oh, boy,” Loomis said, “this is like ‘Dragnet,’ ain’t it? ‘Where were you on the night of December twenty-first? All we want are the facts.’ “

“Just like ‘Dragnet,’ Meyer said drily. “Where were you, Mr. Loomis?”

“Last night? Seven o’clock?” He thought for a moment.
“Oh, sure.”

“Where?”

“Olga’s pad.”

“Who?”

“Olga Trenovich. She’s like a sculptress. She does these crazy little statues in wax. Like she drips the wax all over everything. You dig?”

“And you were with her last night?”

“Yeah. She had like a little session up at her pad. A couple of colored guys on sax and drums and two other kids on trumpet and piano.”

“You got there at seven, Mr. Loomis?”

“No. I got there at six-thirty.”

“And what time did you leave?”

“Gosssshhhhh, who remembers?” Loomis said. “It was the wee, small hours.”

“After midnight, you mean?” Hawes asked.

“Oh, sure. Two, three in the morning,” Loomis said.

“You got there at six-thirty and left at two or three in the morning? Is that right?”

“Yeah.”

“Was Arthur Finch with you?”

“Hell, no.”

“Did you see him at all last night?”

“Nope. Haven’t seen him since — let me see — last month sometime.”

“You were *not* with Arthur Finch in a restaurant called The Gate?”

“When? Last night, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Nope. I just told you. I haven’t seen Artie in almost two weeks.” A sudden spark flashed in Loomis’ eyes and he looked at Hawes and Meyer guiltily.

“Oh-oh,” he said. “What’d I just do? Did I screw up Artie’s alibi?”

“You screwed it up fine, Mr. Loomis,” Hawes said.

* * * *

8

Irene Granavan, Finch's sister, was a twenty-one-year-old girl who had already borne three children and was working on her fourth, in her fifth month of pregnancy. She admitted the detectives to her apartment in a Riverhead housing development, and then immediately sat down.

"You have to forgive me," she said. "My back aches. The doctor thinks maybe it'll be twins. That's all I need is twins." She pressed the palms of her hands into the small of her back, sighed heavily, and said, "I'm always having a baby. I got married when I was seventeen, and I've been pregnant ever since. All my kids think I'm a fat woman. They've never seen me that I wasn't pregnant." She sighed again. "You got any children?" she asked Meyer.

"Three," he answered.

"I sometimes wish . . ." She stopped and pulled a curious face, a face which denied dreams.

"What do you wish, Mrs. Granavan?" Hawes asked.

"That I could go to Bermuda. Alone." She paused. "Have you ever been to Bermuda?"

"No."

"I hear it's very nice there," Irene Granavan said wistfully, and the apartment went still.

"Mrs. Granavan," Meyer said, "we'd like to ask you a few

questions about your brother.”

“What’s he done now?”

“Has he done things before?” Hawes said.

“Well, you know . . .” She shrugged.

“What?” Meyer asked.

“Well, the fuss down at City Hall. And the picketing of that movie. You know.”

“We don’t know, Mrs. Granavan.”

“Well, I hate to say this about my own brother, but I think he’s a little nuts on the subject. You know.”

“What subject?”

“Well, the movie, for example. It’s about Israel, and him and his friends picketed it and all, and handed out pamphlets about Jews, and...You remember, don’t you? The crowd threw stones at him and all. There were a lot of concentration-camp survivors in the crowds you know.” She paused. “I think he must be a little nuts to do something like that, don’t you think?”

“You said something about City Hall, Mrs. Granavan. What did your brother —”

“Well, it was when the mayor invited this Jewish assemblyman — I forget his name — to make a speech with him on the steps of City Hall. My brother went down and — well, the same business. You know.”

“You mentioned your brother’s friends. What friends?”

“The nuts he hangs out with.”

“Would you know their names?” Meyer wanted to know.

“I know only one of them. He was here once with my brother. He’s got pimples all over his face. I remember him because I was pregnant with Sean at the time, and he asked if he could put his hands on my stomach to feel the baby kicking. I told him he certainly could not. That shut *him* up, all right.”

“What was his name, Mrs. Granavan?”

“Fred. That’s short for Frederick. Frederick Schultz.”

“He’s German?” Meyer asked.

“Yes.”

Meyer nodded briefly.

“Mrs. Granavan,” Hawes said, “was your brother here last night?”

“Why? Did he say he was?”

“Was he?”

“No.”

“Not at all?”

“No. He wasn’t here last night. I was home alone last night. My husband bowls on Saturdays.” She paused. “I sit at home and hug my fat belly, and he bowls. You know what I wish sometimes?”

“What?” Meyer asked.

And, as if she had not said it once before, Irene Granavan said, "I wish I could go to Bermuda sometime. Alone."

* * * *

"The thing is," the house painter said to Carella, "I'd like my ladder back."

"I can understand that," Carella said.

"The brushes they can keep, although some of them are very expensive brushes. But the ladder I absolutely need. I'm losing a day's work already because of those guys down at your lab."

"Well, you see —"

"I go back to the synagogue this morning, and my ladder and my brushes and even my paints are all gone. And what a mess somebody made of that alley! So this old guy who's sexton of the place, he tells me the priest was killed Saturday night, and the cops took all the stuff away with them. I wanted to know what cops, and he said he didn't know. So I called headquarters this morning, and I got a runaround from six different cops who finally put me through to some guy named Grossman at the lab."

"Yes, Lieutenant Grossman," Carella said.

"That's right. And he tells me I can't have my goddamn ladder back until they finish their tests on it. Now what the hell do they expect to find on my ladder, would you mind telling me?"

"I don't know, Mr. Cabot. Fingerprints, perhaps."

"Yeah, *my* fingerprints! Am I gonna get involved in murder *besides* losing a day's work?"

"I don't think so," Carella said, smiling.

"I shouldn't have taken that job, anyway," Cabot said. "I shouldn't have even bothered with it."

"Who hired you for the job, Mr. Cabot?"

"The priest did."

"The rabbi, you mean?" Carella asked.

"Yeah, the priest, the rabbi, whatever the hell you call him." Cabot shrugged.

"And what were you supposed to do, Mr. Cabot?"

"I was supposed to paint. What do you think I was supposed to do?"

"Paint what?"

"The trim. Around the windows and the roof."

"White and blue?"

"White around the windows, and blue for the roof trim."

"The colors of Israel," Carella said.

"Yeah," the painter agreed. Then he said, "What?"

"Nothing. Why did you say you shouldn't have taken the job, Mr. Cabot?"

“Well, because of all the arguing first. He wanted it done for Peaceable, he said, and Peaceable fell on the first. But I couldn’t —”

“Peaceable? You mean Passover?”

“Yeah, Peaceable, Passover, whatever the hell you call it.”
He shrugged again.

“You were about to say?”

“I was about to say we had a little argument about it. I was working on another job, and I couldn’t get to his job until Friday, the thirty-first. I figured I’d work late into the night, you know, but the priest told me I couldn’t work after sundown. So I said why can’t I work after sundown, so he said the Sabbath began at sundown, not to mention the first day of Peace— Passover, and that work wasn’t allowed on the first two days of Passover, nor on the Sabbath neither, for that matter. Because the Lord rested on the Sabbath., you see. The seventh day.”

“Yes, I see.”

“Sure. So I said, ‘Father, I’m not of the Jewish faith,’ is what I said, ‘and I can work any day of the week I like.’ Besides, I got a big job to start on Monday, and I figured I could knock off the church all day Friday and Friday night or, if worse came to worse, Saturday, for which I usually get time and a half. So we compromised.”

“How did you compromise?”

“Well, this priest was of what you call the Conservative crowd, not the Reformers, which are very advanced, but still these Conservatives don’t follow all the old rules of the religion is what I gather. So he said I could work during the day Friday, and then I could come back and work Saturday, provided I

knocked off at sundown. Don't ask me what kind of crazy compromise it was. I think he had in mind that he holds mass at sundown and it would be a mortal sin if I was outside painting while everybody was inside praying, and on a very special high holy day, at that."

"I see. So you painted until sundown Friday?"

"Right."

"And then you came back Saturday morning?"

"Right. But what it was, the windows needed a lot of putty, and the sills needed scraping and sanding, so by sundown Saturday, I still wasn't finished with the job. I had a talk with the priest, who said he was about to go inside and pray, and could I come back after services to finish off the job? I told him I had a better idea. I would come back Monday morning and knock off the little bit that had to be done before I went on to this very big job I got in Majesta — it's painting a whole factory; that's a big job. So I left everything right where it was in back of the church. I figured, who'd steal anything from right behind a church. Am I right?"

"Right," Carella said.

"Yeah. Well, you know who'd steal them from right behind a church?"

"Who?"

"The cops!" Cabot shouted. "That's who! Now how the hell do I get my ladder back, would you please tell me? I got a call from the factory today. They said if I don't start work tomorrow, at the latest, I can forget all about the job. And me without a ladder!"

"Maybe we've got a ladder downstairs you can borrow," Carella said.

"Mister, I need a tall painter's ladder. This is a very high factory. Can you call this Captain Grossman and ask him to please let me have my ladder back? I got mouths to feed."

"I'll talk to him, Mr. Cabot," Carella said. "Leave me your number, will you?"

"I tried to borrow my brother-in-law's ladder — he's a paper hanger — but he's papering this movie star's apartment, downtown on Jefferson. So just try to get *his* ladder. Just try."

"Well, I'll call Grossman," Carella said.

"The other day, what she done, this movie actress, she marched into the living room wearing only this towel, you see? She wanted to know what —"

"I'll call Grossman," Carella said.

As it turned out, he didn't have to call Grossman, because a lab report arrived late that afternoon, together with Cabot's ladder and the rest of his working equipment, including his brushes, his putty knife, several cans of linseed oil and turpentine, a pair of paint-stained gloves and two dropcloths. At about the same time the report arrived, Grossman called from downtown, saving Carella a dime.

"Did you get my report?" Grossman asked.

"I was just reading it."

"What do you make of it?"

"I don't know," Carella said.

“Want my guess?”

“Sure. I’m always interested in what the layman thinks,” Carella answered him.

“Layman, I’ll give you a hit in the head!” Grossman answered, laughing. “You notice the rabbi’s prints were on those paint-can lids, and also on the ladder?”

“Yes, I did.”

“The ones on the lids were thumb prints, so I imagine the rabbi put those lids back onto the paint cans or, if they were already on the cans, pushed down on them to make sure they were secure.”

“Why would he want to do that?”

“Maybe he was moving the stuff. There’s a tool shed behind the synagogue. Had you noticed that?”

“No, I hadn’t.”

“Tch-tch, big detective. Yeah, there’s one there, all right, about fifty yards behind the building. So I figure the painter rushed off, leaving his junk all over the back yard, and the rabbi was moving it to the tool shed when he was surprised by the killer.”

“Well, the painter did leave his stuff there, that’s true. He expected to come back Monday morning.”

“Today, yeah,” Grossman said. “But maybe the rabbi figured he didn’t want his back yard looking like a pigsty, especially since this is Passover. So he took it into his head to move the stuff over to the tool shed. This is just speculation,

you understand.”

“No kidding?” Carella said. “I thought it was sound, scientific deduction.”

“Go to hell. Those *are* thumb prints on the lids, so it’s logical to conclude he pressed down on them. And the prints on the ladder seem to indicate he was carrying it.”

“This report said you didn’t find any prints but the rabbi’s,” Carella said. “Isn’t that just a little unusual?”

“You didn’t read it right,” Grossman said. “We found a portion of a print on one of the paintbrushes. And we also —”

“Oh, yeah,” Carella said, “here it is. This doesn’t say much, Sam.”

“What do you want me to do? It seems to be a tented-arch pattern, like the rabbi’s, but there’s too little to tell. The print could have been left on that brush by someone else.”

“Like the painter?”

“No. We’ve pretty much decided the painter used gloves while he worked. Otherwise, we’d have found a flock of similar prints on all the tools.”

“Then who left that print on the brush? The killer?”

“Maybe.”

“But the portion isn’t enough to get anything positive on?”

“Sorry, Steve.”

“So your guess on what happened is that the rabbi went

outside after services to clean up the mess. The killer surprised him, knifed him, made a mess of the alley, and then painted that J on the wall. Is that it?"

"I guess so, though —"

"What?"

"Well, there was a lot of blood leading right over to that wall, Steve. As if the rabbi had crawled there after he'd been stabbed."

"Probably trying to get to the back door of the synagogue."

"Maybe," Grossman said. "One thing I can tell you. Whoever killed him must have been pretty much of a mess when he got home. No doubt about that."

"Why do you say that?"

"That splattered paint all over the alley," Grossman said. "It's my guess that the rabbi threw those paint cans at his attacker."

"You're a pretty good guesser, Sam," Carella told him, grinning.

"Thanks," Grossman said.

"Tell me something."

"Yeah?"

"You ever solve any murders?"

"Go to hell," Grossman said, and he hung up.

* * * *

9

Alone with his wife that night in the living room of their apartment, Meyer tried to keep his attention *off* a television series about cops and *on* the various documents he had collected from Rabbi Solomon's study in the synagogue. The cops on television were shooting up a storm, blank bullets flying all over the place and killing hoodlums by the score. It almost made a working man like Meyer Meyer wish for an exciting life of romantic adventure.

The romantic adventure of *his* life, Sarah Lipkin Meyer, sat in an easy chair opposite the television screen, her legs crossed, absorbed in the fictional derring-do of the policemen.

"Ooooh, *get him!*" Sarah screamed at one point, and Meyer turned to look at her curiously, and then went back to the rabbi's books.

The rabbi kept a ledger of expenses, all of which had to do with the synagogue and his duties there. The ledger did not make interesting reading, and told Meyer nothing he wanted to know. The rabbi also kept a calendar of synagogue events and Meyer glanced through them reminiscently, remembering his own youth and the busy Jewish life centering around the synagogue in the neighborhood adjacent to his own. *March twelfth*, the calendar read, *regular Sunday breakfast of the Men's Club, Speaker, Harry Pine, director of Commission on International Affairs of American Jewish Congress, Topic: The Eichmann Case.*

Meyer's eye ran down the list of events itemized in Rabbi Solomon's book:

March 12, 7:15p.m.

Youth Group meeting.

March 18, 9:30 a.m.

Bar Mitzvah services for Nathan Rothman. Kiddush after services. Open invitation to Center membership.

March 22, 8:45p.m.

Clinton Samuels. Assistant Professor of Philosophy in Education, Brandeis University, will lead discussion in "The Matter of Identity for the Jews in Modern America."

March 26

Eternal Light Radio. "The Search" by Virginia Mazer, biographical script on Lillian Wald, founder of Henry Street Settlement in New York.

Meyer looked up from the calendar. "Sarah?" he said.

"Shhh, shhh, just a minute," Sarah answered. She was nibbling furiously at her thumb, her eyes glued to the silent television screen. An ear-shattering volley of shots suddenly erupted, all but smashing the picture tube. The theme music came up, and Sarah let out a deep sigh and turned to her husband.

Meyer looked at her curiously, as if seeing her for the first time, remembering the Sarah Lipkin of long, long ago and wondering if the Sarah Meyer of today was very much different from that initial exciting image. "Nobody's lips kin like Sarah's lips kin," the fraternity boys had chanted, and Meyer had memorized the chant, and investigated the possibilities, learning for the first time in his life that every cliché bears a kernel of folklore. He looked at her mouth now, pursed in

puzzlement as she studied his face. Her eyes were blue, and her hair was brown, and she had a damn good figure and splendid legs, and he nodded in agreement with his youthful judgment.

“Sarah., do you feel any identity as a Jew in modern America?” he asked.

“What?” Sarah said.

“I said —”

“Oh, boy,” Sarah said. “What brought *that* on?”

“The rabbi, I guess.” Meyer scratched his bald pate. “I guess I haven’t felt so much like a Jew since — since I was confirmed, I guess. It’s a funny thing.”

“Don’t let it trouble you,” Sarah said gently. “You *are* a Jew.”

“Am I?” he asked, and he looked straight into her eyes.

She returned the gaze. “You have to answer that one for yourself,” she said.

“I know I — well, I get mad as hell thinking about this guy Finch. Which isn’t good, you know. After all, maybe he’s innocent.”

“Do you think so?”

“No. I think he did it. But is it *me* who thinks that, Meyer Meyer, Detective Second Grade? Or is it Meyer Meyer who got beat up by the *goyim* when he was a kid, and Meyer Meyer who heard his grandfather tell stories about pogroms, or who listened to the radio and heard what Hitler was doing in Germany, or who nearly strangled a German colonel with his

bare hands just outside —”

“You can’t separate the two, darling,” Sarah said.

“Maybe you can’t. I’m only trying to say I never much felt like a Jew until this case came along. Now, all of a sudden . . .” He shrugged.

“Shall I get your prayer shawl?” Sarah said.

“Wise guy,” Meyer said. He closed the rabbi’s calendar, and opened the next book on the desk. The book was a personal diary. He unlocked it, and began leafing through it.

Friday, January 6

Shabbat, Parshat Shemot. I lighted the candles at 4:24. Evening services were at 6:15. It has been a hundred years since the Civil Wars. We discussed the Jewish Community of the South, then and now.

It seems odd to me that I should have to familiarize the membership about the proper blessings over the Sabbath candles. Have we come so far toward forgetfulness?

*Baruch ata adonai elohenu melech haolam
asher kidshanu b’mitzvotav vitzivanu Vhadlick ner
shel shabbat.*

Blessed are Thou O Lord our God., King of the universe who hast sanctified us by Thy laws and commanded us to kindle the Sabbath Light.

Perhaps he is right. Perhaps the Jews are doomed.

January 20

I had hoped that the Maccabean festival would make us realize the hardships borne by the Jews 2,000 years ago in comparison to our good and easy lives today in a democracy. Today, we have the freedom to worship as we desire, but this should impose upon us the responsibility of enjoying that freedom. And yet, Hanukkah has come and gone, and it seems to me The Feast of Lights taught us nothing, gave us nothing more than a joyous holiday to celebrate. The Jews will die, he says.

February 2

I believe I am beginning to fear him. He shouted threats at me today, said that I, of all the Jews, would lead the way to destruction. I was tempted to call the police, but I understand he has done this before. There are those in the membership who have suffered his harangues and who seemed to feel he is harmless. But he rants with the fervor of a fanatic, and his eyes frighten me.

February 12

A member called today to ask me something about the dietary laws. I was forced to call the local butcher because I did not know the prescribed length of the *hallaf*, the slaughtering knife. Even the butcher, in jest, said to me that a real rabbi would know these things. I *am* a real rabbi. I believe in the Lord, my God, I teach His will and His law to His people. What need a rabbi know about *shehitah*, the art of slaughtering animals? Is it important to know that the slaughtering knife must be twice the width of the throat of the slaughtered animal, and no more than fourteen fingerbreadths in length? The butcher told me that the knife must be sharp and smooth, with no perceptible notches. It is examined by passing finger and fingernail over both edges of the

blade before and after slaughtering. If a notch is found,, the animal is then unfit. Now I know. But is it necessary to know this? Is it not enough to love God, and to teach His ways? His anger continues to frighten me.

February 14

I found a knife in the ark today, at the rear of the cabinet behind the Torah.

March 8

We had no further use of the Bibles we replaced, and since they were old and tattered, but nonetheless ritual articles containing the name of God, we buried them in the back yard, near the tool shed.

March 22

I must see about contacting a painter to do the outside of the synagogue. Someone suggested a Mr. Frank Cabot who lives in the neighborhood. I will call him tomorrow, perhaps. Passover will be coming soon, and I would like the temple to look nice.

The mystery is solved. It is kept for trimming the wick in the oil lamp over the ark.

The telephone rang. Meyer, absorbed in the diary, didn't even hear it. Sarah went to the phone and lifted it from the cradle.

"Hello?" she said. "Oh, hello, Steve. How are you?" She laughed and said, "No, I was watching television. That's right." She laughed again. "Yes, just a minute, I'll get him." She put the phone down and walked to where Meyer was working. "It's Steve," she said. "He wants to speak to you."

"Huh?"

“The phone, Steve.”

“Oh,” Meyer nodded. “Thanks.” He walked over to the phone and lifted the receiver. “Hello, Steve,” he said.

“Hi. Can you get down here right away?”

“Why? What’s the matter?”

“Finch,” Carella said. “He’s broken jail.”

* * * *

10

Finch had been kept in the detention cells of the precinct house all day Sunday where, it being Easter, he had been served turkey for his midday meal. On Monday morning, he'd been transported by van to Headquarters downtown on High Street where, as a felony offender, he participated in that quaint police custom known simply as "the line-up." He had been mugged and printed afterward in the basement of the building, and then led across the street to the Criminal Courts Building where he had been arraigned for first-degree murder and, over his lawyer's protest, ordered to be held without bail until trial. The police van had then transported him crosstown to the house of detention on Canopy Avenue where he'd remained all day Monday, until after the evening meal. At that time, those offenders who had committed, or who were alleged to have committed, the most serious crimes, were once more shackled and put into the van, which carried them uptown and south to the edge of the River Dix for transportation by ferry to the prison on Walker Island.

He'd made his break, Carella reported, while he was being moved from the van to the ferry. According to what the harbor police said, Finch was still handcuffed and wearing prison garb. The break had taken place at about ten p.m. It was assumed that it had been witnessed by several dozen hospital attendants waiting for the ferry which would take them to Dix Sanitarium, a city-owned-and-operated hospital for drug addicts, situated in the middle of the river about a mile and a half from the prison. It was also assumed that the break had been witnessed by a dozen or more water rats who leaped among the dock pilings and who, because of their size, were sometimes mistaken for pussy cats by neighborhood kids who played near the river's

edge. Considering the fact that Finch was dressed in drab gray uniform and handcuffs — a dazzling display of sartorial elegance, to be sure, but not likely to be seen on any other male walking the city streets — it was amazing that he hadn't yet been picked up. They had, of course, checked his apartment first, finding nothing there but the four walls and the furniture. One of the unmarried detectives on the squad, probably hoping for an invitation to go along, suggested that they look up Eleanor Fay, Finch's girl. Wasn't it likely he'd head for her pad? Carella and Meyer agreed that it was entirely likely, clipped their holsters on, neglected to offer the invitation to their colleague, and went out into the night.

It was a nice night, and Eleanor Fay lived in a nice neighborhood of old brownstones wedged in between new, all-glass apartment houses with garages below the sidewalk. April had danced across the city and left her subtle warmth in the air. The two men drove in one of the squad's sedans, the windows rolled down. They did not say much to each other, April had robbed them of speech. The police radio droned its calls endlessly; radio motor patrolmen all over the city acknowledged violence and mayhem.

"There it is," Meyer said. "Just up ahead."

"Now try to find a parking spot," Carella complained.

They circled the block twice before finding an opening in front of a drugstore on the avenue. They got out of the car, left it unlocked, and walked briskly in the balmy night. The brownstone was in the middle of the block. They climbed the twelve steps to the vestibule, and studied the name plates alongside the buzzers. Eleanor Fay was in apartment 2B. Without hesitation, Carella pressed the buzzer for apartment 5A. Meyer took the doorknob in his hand and waited. When the answering click came, he twisted the knob, and silently they headed for the steps to the second floor.

Kicking in a door is an essentially rude practice. Neither Carella nor Meyer were particularly lacking in good manners, but they were looking for a man accused of murder, and a man who had successfully broken jail. It was not unnatural to assume this was a desperate man, and so they didn't even discuss whether or not they would kick in the door. They aligned themselves in the corridor outside apartment 2B. The wall opposite the door was too far away to serve as a springboard. Meyer, the heavier of the two men, backed away from the door, then hit it with his shoulder. He hit it hard and close to the lock. He wasn't attempting to shatter the door itself, an all but impossible feat. All he wanted to do was spring the lock. All the weight of his body concentrated in the padded spot of arm and shoulder which collided with the door just above the lock. The lock itself remained locked, but the screws holding it to the jamb could not resist the force of Meyer's fleshy battering ram. The wood around the screws splintered, the threads lost their friction grip, the door shot inward and Meyer followed it into the room. Carella, like a quarterback carrying the ball behind powerful interference, followed Meyer.

It's rare that a cop encounters raw sex in his daily routine. The naked bodies he sees are generally cold and covered with caked blood. Even vice-squad cops find the act of love sordid rather than enticing. Eleanor Fay was lying full length on the living-room couch with a man. The television set in front of the couch was going, but nobody was watching either the news or the weather.

When the two men with drawn guns piled into the room behind the imploding door, Eleanor Fay sat bolt upright on the couch, her eyes wide in surprise. She was naked to the waist. She was wearing tight-fitting black tapered slacks and black high-heeled pumps. Her hair was disarranged and her lipstick had been kissed from her mouth, and she tried to cover her exposed breasts with her hands the moment the cops entered,

realized the task was impossible, and grabbed the nearest article of clothing, which happened to be the man's suit jacket. She held it up in front of her like the classic, surprised heroine in a pirate movie. The man beside her sat up with equal suddenness, turned toward the cops, then turned back to Eleanor, puzzled, as if seeking an explanation from her.

The man was not Arthur Finch.

He was a man in his late twenties. He had a lot of pimples on his face, and a lot of lipstick stains. His white shirt was open to the waist. He wore no undershirt.

"Hello, Miss Fay," Meyer said.

"I didn't hear you knock," Eleanor answered. She seemed to recover instantly from her initial surprise and embarrassment. With total disdain for the two detectives, she threw the jacket aside, rose and walked like a burlesque queen to a hard-backed chair over which her missing clothing was draped. She lifted a braissiere, shrugged into it, clasped it, all as if she were alone in the room. Then she pulled a black, long-sleeved sweater over her head, shook out her hair, lighted a cigarette, and said, "Is breaking and entering only a crime for criminals?"

"We're sorry, miss," Carella said. "We're looking for your boy friend."

"Me?" the man on the couch asked. "What'd I do?"

A glance of puzzlement passed between Meyer and Carella. Something like understanding, faint and none too clear, touched Carella's face.

"Who are you?" he said.

"You don't have to tell them anything," Eleanor cautioned. "They're not allowed to break in like this. Private citizens have rights, too."

"That's right, Miss Fay," Meyer said. "Why'd you lie to us?"

"I didn't lie to anybody."

"You gave us false information about Finch's whereabouts on —"

"I wasn't aware I was under oath at the time."

"You weren't. But you were damn well maliciously impeding the progress of an investigation."

"The hell with you *and* your investigation. You horny bastards bust in here like —"

"We're sorry we spoiled your party," Carella said. "Why'd you lie about Finch?"

"I thought I was helping you," Eleanor said. "Now get the hell out of here."

"We're staying a while, Miss Fay," Meyer said, "so get off your high horse. How'd you figure you were helping us? By sending us on a wild-goose chase confirming alibis you knew were false?"

"I didn't know anything. I told you just what Arthur told me."

"That's a lie."

"Why don't you get out?" Eleanor said. "Or are you hoping I'll take off my sweater again?"

“What you’ve got, we’ve already seen, lady,” Carella said. He turned to the man. “What’s your name?”

“Don’t tell him,” Eleanor said.

“Here or uptown, take your choice,” Carella said. “Arthur Finch has broken jail, and we’re trying to find him. If you want to be accessories to —”

“Broken jail?” Eleanor went a trifle pale. She glanced at the man on the couch, and their eyes met.

“Wh— when did this happen?” the man asked.

“About ten o’clock tonight.”

The man was silent for several moments. “That’s not so good,” he said at last.

“How about telling us who you are,” Carella suggested.

“Frederick Schultz,” the man said.

“That makes it all very cozy, doesn’t it?” Meyer said.

“Get your mind out of the gutter,” Eleanor said. “I’m not Finch’s girl, and I never was.”

“Then why’d you say you were?”

“I didn’t want Freddie to get involved in this thing.”

“How could he possibly get involved?”

Eleanor shrugged.

“What is it? Was Finch with Freddie on Saturday night?”

Eleanor nodded reluctantly.

“From what time to what time?”

“From seven to ten,’ Freddie said.

“Then he couldn’t have killed the rabbi.”

“Who said he did?” Freddie answered.

“Why didn’t you tell us this?”

“Because . . .” Eleanor started, and then stopped dead.

“Because they had something to hide,” Carella said.

“Why’d he come to see you, Freddie?”

Freddie did not answer.

“Hold it,” Meyer said. “This is the other Jew-hater, Steve. The one Finch’s sister told me about. Isn’t that right, Freddie?”

Freddie did not answer.

“Why’d he come to see you, Freddie? To pick up those pamphlets we found in his closet?”

“You the guy who prints that crap, Freddie?”

“What’s the matter, Freddie? Weren’t you sure how much of a crime was involved?”

“Did you figure he’d tell us where he got the stuff, Freddie?”

“You’re a real good pal, aren’t you, Freddie? You’d send your friend to the chair rather than —”

“I don’t owe him anything!” Freddie said.

“Maybe you owe him a lot. He was facing a murder rap, but he never once mentioned your name. You went to all that trouble for nothing, Miss Fay.”

“It was no trouble,” Eleanor said thinly.

“No,” Meyer said. “You marched into the precinct with a tight dress and a cockamamie bunch of alibis that you knew we’d check. You figured once we found those to be phony, we wouldn’t believe anything else Finch said. Even if he told us where he *really* was, we wouldn’t believe it. That’s right, isn’t it?”

“You finished?” Eleanor asked.

“No, but I think you are,” Meyer answered.

“You had no right to bust in here. There’s no law against making love.”

“Sister,” Carella said, “*you* were making hate.”

* * * *

11

Arthur Finch wasn't making anything when they found him.

They found him at ten minutes past two, on the morning of April fourth. They found him in his apartment because a patrolman had been sent there to pick up the pamphlets in his closet. They found him lying in front of the kitchen table. He was still handcuffed. A file and rasp were on the table top, and there were metal filings covering the enamel and a spot on the linoleum floor, but Finch had made only a small dent in the manacles. The filings on the floor were floating in a red, sticky substance.

Finch's throat was open from ear to ear.

The patrolman, expecting to make a routine pickup, found the body and had the presence of mind to call his patrol-car partner before he panicked. His partner went down to the car and radioed the homicide to Headquarters, who informed Homicide South and the detectives of the 87th Squad.

The patrolmen were busy that night. At three a.m., a citizen called in to report what he thought was a leak in a water main on South Fifth. The radio dispatcher at Headquarters sent a car to investigate, and the patrolman found that nothing was wrong with the water main, but something was interfering with the city's fine sewage system.

The men were not members of the Department of Sanitation, but they nonetheless climbed down a manhole into the stink and garbage, and located a man's black suit caught on an orange crate and blocking a pipe, causing the water to back

up into the street. The man's suit was spattered with white and blue paint. The patrolmen were ready to throw it into the nearest garbage can when one of them noticed it was also spattered with something that could have been dried blood. Being conscientious law-enforcement officers, they combed the garbage out of their hair and delivered the garment to their precinct house — which happened to be the 87th.

Meyer and Carella were delighted to receive the suit.

It didn't tell them a goddamned thing about who owned it, but it nonetheless indicated to them that whoever had killed the rabbi was now busily engaged in covering his tracks and this, in turn, indicated a high state of anxiety. Somebody had heard the news broadcast announcing Finch's escape. Somebody had been worried about Finch establishing an alibi for himself that would doubtlessly clear him.

With twisted reasoning somebody figured the best way to cover one homicide was to commit another. And somebody had hastily decided to get rid of the garments he'd worn while disposing of the rabbi.

The detectives weren't psychologists, but two mistakes had been committed in the same early morning, and they figured their prey was getting slightly desperate.

"It has to be another of Finch's crowd," Carella said. "Whoever killed Solomon painted a J on the wall. If he'd had time, he probably would have drawn a swastika as well."

"But why would he do that?" Meyer asked. "He'd automatically be telling us that an anti-Semite killed the rabbi."

"So? How many anti-Semites do you suppose there are in this city?"

“How many?” Meyer asked.

“I wouldn’t want to count them,” Carella said. “Whoever killed Yaakov Solomon was bold enough to —”

“Jacob,” Meyer corrected.

“Yaakov, Jacob, what’s the difference? The killer was bold enough to presume there were plenty of people who felt *exactly* the way he did. He painted that J on the wall and dared us to find *which* Jew-hater had done the job.” Carella paused. “Does this bother you very much, Meyer?”

“Sure, it bothers me.”

“I mean, my saying —”

“Don’t be a boob, Steve.”

“Okay. I think we ought to look up this woman again. What was her name? Hannah something. Maybe she knows —”

“I don’t think that’ll help us. Maybe we ought to talk to the rabbi’s wife. There’s indication in his diary that he knew the killer, that he’d had threats. Maybe she knows who was baiting him.”

“It’s four o’clock in the morning,” Carella said. “I don’t think it’s a good idea right now.”

“We’ll go after breakfast.”

“It won’t hurt to talk to Yirmiyahu again, either. If the rabbi was threatened, maybe —”

“Jeremiah,” Meyer corrected.

“What?”

“Jeremiah. Yirmiyahu is Hebrew for Jeremiah.”

“Oh. Well, anyway, him. It’s possible the rabbi took him into his confidence, mentioned this —”

“Jeremiah,” Meyer said again.

“What?”

“No.” Meyer shook his head. “That’s impossible. He’s a holy man. And if there’s anything a really good Jew despises, it’s —”

“What are you talking about?” Carella said.

“— it’s killing. Judaism teaches that you don’t murder, unless in self-defense.” His brow suddenly furrowed into a frown. “Still, remember when I was about to light that cigarette? He asked me if I was Jewish — remember? He was shocked that I would smoke on the second day of Passover.”

“Meyer, I’m a little sleepy. Who are you talking about?” Carella wanted to know.

“Yirmiyahu. Jeremiah. Steve, you don’t think —”

‘I’m just not following you, Meyer.’

‘You don’t think . . . you don’t think the rabbi painted that wall *himself*, do you?’

“Why would . . . what do you mean?”

“To tell us who’d stabbed him? To tell us who the killer was?”

“How would —”

“Jeremiah,’ Meyer said.

Carella looked at Meyer silently for a full thirty seconds.
Then he nodded and said, “J.”

* * * *

12

He was burying something in the back yard behind the synagogue when they found him. They had gone to his home first and awakened his wife. She was an old Jewish woman, her head shaved in keeping with the Orthodox tradition. She covered her head with a shawl, and she sat in the kitchen of her ground-floor apartment and tried to remember what had happened on the second night of Passover. Yes, her husband had gone to the synagogue for evening services. Yes, he had come home directly after services.

“Did you see him when he came in?” Meyer asked.

“I was in the kitchen,” Mrs. Cohen answered. “I was preparing the *seder*. I heard the door open, and he went in the bedroom.”

“Did you see what he was wearing?”

“No.”

“What was he wearing during the *seder*?”

“I don’t remember.”

“Had he changed his clothes, Mrs. Cohen? Would you remember that?”

“I think so, yes. He had on a black suit when he went to temple. I think he wore a different suit after.” The old woman looked bewildered. She didn’t know why they were asking these questions. Nonetheless, she answered them.

"Did you smell anything strange in the house, Mrs. Cohen?"

"Smell?"

"Yes. Did you smell paint?"

"Paint? No, I smelled nothing strange."

They found him in the yard behind the synagogue.

He was an old man with sorrow in his eyes and in the stoop of his posture. He had a shovel in his hands, and he was patting the earth with the blade. He nodded, as if he knew why they were there. They faced each other across the small mound of freshly turned earth at Yirmiyahu's feet.

Carella did not say a solitary word during the questioning and arrest. He stood next to Meyer Meyer, and he felt only an odd sort of pain.

"What did you bury, Mr. Cohen?" Meyer asked. He spoke very softly. It was five o'clock in the morning, and night was fleeing the sky. There was a slight chill on the air. The wind seemed to penetrate to the sexton's marrow. He seemed on the verge of shivering. "What did you bury, Mr. Cohen? Tell me."

"A ritual object," the sexton answered.

"What, Mr. Cohen?"

"I have no further use for it. It is a ritual object. I am sure it had to be buried. I must ask the *rov*. I must ask him what the Talmud says." Yirmiyahu fell silent. He looked at the mound of earth at his feet. "The *rov* is dead, isn't he?" he said, almost to himself. "He is dead." He looked sadly into Meyer's eyes.

“Yes,” Meyer answered.

“*Baruch dayyan haemet*” Yirmiyahu said. “You are Jewish?”

“Yes,” Meyer answered.

“Blessed be God the true judge,” Yirmiyahu translated, as if he had not heard Meyer.

“What did you bury, Mr. Cohen?”

“The knife,” Yirmiyahu said. “The knife I used to trim the wick. It *is* a ritual object, don’t you think? It should be buried, don’t you think?” He paused. “You see . . .” His shoulders began to shake. He began weeping suddenly. “I killed,” he said. The sobs started somewhere deep within the man, started wherever his roots were, started in the soul of the man, in the knowledge that he had committed the unspeakable crime — thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not kill. “I killed,” he said again, but this time there were only tears, no sobs.

“Did you kill Arthur Finch?” Meyer asked.

The sexton nodded.

“Did you kill Rabbi Solomon?”

“He... you see ... he was working. It was the second day of Passover, and he was working. I was inside when I heard the noise. I went to look and ... he was carrying paints, paint cans in one hand, and...a ladder in the other. He was *working*. I ... took the knife from the ark, the knife I used to trim the wick. I had told him before this. I had told him he was not a *real* Jew, that his new... his new ways would be the end of the Jewish people. And this, *this!* To work on the second day of Passover!”

“What happened, Mr. Cohen?” Meyer asked gently.

“I — the knife was in my hand. I went at him with the knife. He — he tried to stop me. He threw paint at me. I — I —” The sexton’s right hand came up as if clasped around a knife. The hand trembled as it unconsciously re-enacted the events that night. “I cut him. I cut him. ... I killed him.”

Yirmiyahu stood in the alley with the sun intimidating the peaks of the buildings now. He stood with his head bent, staring down at the mound of earth which covered the buried knife. His face was thin and gaunt, a face tormented by the centuries. The tears still spilled from his eyes and coursed down his cheeks. His shoulders shook with the sobs that came from somewhere deep in his guts. Carella turned away because it seemed to him in that moment that he was watching the disintegration of a man, and he did not want to see it.

Meyer put his arm around the sexton’s shoulder.

“Come, *tsadik*? he said. “Come. You must come with me now.”

The old man said nothing. His hands hung loosely at his sides.

They began walking slowly out of the alley. As they passed the painted J on the synagogue wall, the sexton said, “*Olov ha-shalom.*”

“What did he say?” Carella asked.

“He said, ‘Peace be upon him.’ “

“Amen,” Carella said.

They walked silently out of the alley together.

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